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ABSTRACT

The merger of the Tennessee State University's institutional research office and the planning, management, and evaluation offices is described. The roles of the institutional research office before the merger were the collection and dissemination of institutional data, storing of data collected from other sources, and conducting special studies. The planning, management, and evaluation office's primary role was to improve the administrative areas. It was involved in management techniques such as management-by-objectives and prediction models. The consolidated offices now collect and interpret data, communicate results to the campus community, and conduct studies. As a result of the merger, the institutional research staff has become more active in the management decision-making process. Joint activities include: the management-by-objectives process, cost study analysis, student data analysis, study of the committee structure of the university, study of resource allocation and utilization, development of a comprehensive five-year plan, development of a policy and procedures manual, development of an organizational chart and methods for evaluating the Advanced Institutional Development Program, defining responsibilities of positions at the institution, evaluation of system processes, and revamping the statistical data base. The two offices work both jointly and independently on projects and their influence and visibility in the university have expanded. (SW)

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EXPANDING THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

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EXPANDING THE ROLE OF INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH

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The functions and roles of an institutional research office varies significantly from institution to institution. One has only to scan through an Association for Institutional Research membership directory and note the various offices' names--institutional research, institutional management, institutional analysis, institutional planning, institutional research and planning, etc. Oftentimes, the role of the office will be determined by the personalities and the expertise of the director and his/her staff. Their educational backgrounds and experiences may be in higher education, mathematics, business, statistics or computer sciences.

Additionally, IR roles may be determined by the office's location in the organizational chart. Some report to the president, others to an executive vice president, an assistant to the president, or perhaps a vice president for business or administration. For example, if an institutional research office is located in the chief business officer's area, it probably will be more involved in budget planning and in collecting and analyzing fiscal data.

This paper is a case study of an institutional research office whose former primary role was to respond to external data requests such as the HEGIS and SACS reports, and the institution's governing board as well as service the various information requests from university constituents ranging from department chairpersons to the president, and an occasional student. However, the office was merged with the planning, management and evaluation office, which was recently established through a federal grant, which by its nature was more involved in the policy formulation and analysis process.

The consolidation was designed to strengthen both offices and enhance the services which the expanded role required them to deliver. The impact of the merger on the institutional research office was the transformation of a passive data collection and dissemination role toward a more active role in the university's decisionmaking process.

While the roles of institutional research office will continue to be diverse and will vary from institution to institution, this paper's purpose is to illustrate how an IR office at one institution became a more active participant in the management decisionmaking mainstream.

The Consolidation of the Two Offices

In the past, the institutional research office collected and disseminated institutional data as well as stored data collected from other sources. Additionally, at the request of an executive officer or a department, special studies were conducted. While these roles were important ones, it gained little visibility, as is true with many IR offices, to the department or its staff. A part-time director who served as the director of the computer centers supervised the office. While data requests were serviced, there was little communication of essential and basis data to the various departments of the institution. The planning, management and evaluation office's primary role was to improve the university's planning, management and evaluation capabilities which resulted in its quickly becoming a highly visible office because of its involvement in management techniques such as Management-By Objectives and prediction models.

The PME office utilized much of the data generated by the IR office and, in some cases, would conduct extensive analyses of IR data, and use the

information to formulate short and long range policy recommendations and strategies.

The president of the university decided that the two offices should be consolidated under one director since many of their functions depended on cooperation between both offices. While the staff of both offices still retained many of their previous responsibilities, they now work jointly on projects, and role emphasis shifted not only to collecting the data, but in interpreting the data and then communicating results of analyses to the campus community.

Additionally, the consolidated offices engage in numerous independent studies which were initiated by the staff and conducted on a priority basis when time permitted.

Activities Undertaken By the IR and PME Offices

Management By Objectives

The PME office has developed a Management-By-Objectives process which is currently being finetuned this semester. The process is currently being implemented this semester on a trial basis. The IR office at the end of the semester will design an evaluation questionnaire which will be sent to individuals participating in the process in order to access the process. The evaluation will result in additional finetuning of the process before it is fully implemented in the next semester. Additionally, the two offices will do a joint study after the first year of Management-By-Objectives in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the process.

Cost Study Analysis

Each year, the institution's governing agency requires that a systemwide academic cost study be conducted which involves all its institutions. The IR

office previously was responsible for collecting cost study data which then was processed by the staff of the governing agency. This year, the IR and PME staffs are conducting their own analyses of the data collected from the cost study. Teaching loads, class sizes, faculty salary analyses by rank sex, and discipline are all being reviewed and will be presented with recommendations to the executive council.

Student Data

The two offices are conducting extensive analyses of data on students on a departmental basis. These analyses are designed to provide data to the academic department on their students in terms of where they come from, their characteristics (which varies from department to department), their goals, and their future plans. The primary purpose of providing this data is to assist departments in learning about their students and to use the data in departmental planning and enrollment forecasting.

Committee Structure

During the past year, the PME conducted a detailed study on the committee structure of the university. It examined the bylaws, membership composition, goals, and activities of approximately 30 university-wide committees, and published a document on the committee structure. This year, the two offices will do a joint study on the changes that the various committees have implemented. Additionally, many of the committees have been turned over to the faculty senate, and a follow-up study will be done to determine what changes have been made as the result of a policy decision to revise the reporting relationships of the committees.

Resource Allocation and Utilization

Both offices were involved in an extensive resource utilization and allocation study during the past year. Data were collected and numerous

studies were conducted during the examination. The study was executed in conjunction with the president's council and resulted in a 400 page document with over 150 recommendations for improving the utilization and allocation of resources throughout the campus. Additionally, the two offices currently are coordinating a follow-up study to ascertain what recommendations have been implemented. Additionally, they are also jointly developing and examining various resource management tools.

Comprehensive Five Year Plan

The PME office is responsible for developing a comprehensive five year plan which will be sent to its governing agency. The two offices have worked jointly in collecting previous data on student majors, student credit hour production, faculty and staff characteristics, and physical facilities which will be used to make projections on student, staff and financial projections over the next five years. The two offices also are assisting departments with their unit projections while monitoring the institutional projection. The PME office also worked with a committee charged with the institution's role and scope and developed the institutional planning guidelines and assumptions relative to the five year plan.

Once the study has been completed and published, the two offices will jointly monitor the five year plan on an annual basis and will participate in developing planning recommendations.

Policy and Procedures

The PME office is being assisted by the IR office in developing a comprehensive policy and procedure manual for the institution. Once all policies and procedures have been compiled, the two offices will then work with the executive council to analyze various policies and procedures, to

develop policy recommendations as well as examine before they are implemented in order to ascertain the potential impact of new and revised policies. For example, the IR office recently reviewed the university's revised student suspension and probation policy which resulted in a series of recommendations being made relative to the policy and the impact that it was having on students and the institution.

Comprehensive Organizational Chart

During the past year, the PME developed a comprehensive organizational chart which pinpointed most of the school's 900 personnel. A chart was constructed for every unit on the campus which resulted in a 100 page document. This year, the two offices will document organizational changes which have been made during the past year, revise the organization charts in order to reflect title and personnel changes in various positions, analyze the shifts in personnel, and publish and distribute the revised charts to the campus community.

Advanced Institutional Development Program

The two offices will work jointly to develop methods for evaluating the 15 AIDP programs prior to an external evaluation. Additionally, they are working with various activity coordinators who wish to assess their programs in terms of efficiency and effectiveness.

Defining Position Responsibility

The PME office with the assistance of external consultants during the past year conducted audits of most major positions at the institution. The audits documented the responsibilities of each position, individuals supervised in the position, and reporting relationships between various units. The two offices will conduct follow-up studies relative to the audits and make recommendations to the president.

Evaluation System Processes

The PME office recently worked with the executive council to revise the instruments used to evaluate faculty, administrators and clerical staffs which resulted in the evaluation process being revised for the faculty and administrators. The IR office will examine the impact of the revised evaluation structures by developing a questionnaire which will ascertain the improvements in the new evaluation system in comparison to the old structure. From this study, recommendations will then be formulated and presented to the executive council.

Revamping the Statistical Data Base

The PME and IR offices are currently working with the executive council in order to define the elements that should be contained in the statistical data base which is currently being reviewed. Once the review is completed, the two offices plan to publish a statistical factbook on a semester basis which will provide permanent data to assist departments and administrators with their planning efforts.

The offices are also examining how departments use data, and are developing procedures for determining what data source will be official institutional data and at what point will the data become official. Various units on campus collect similar data and often they conflict because of different definitions used to categorize data or because the data has been collected at different times.

For example, different units have different definitions for determining who is considered a faculty member. Additionally, financial and personnel data are in a constant state of change during the year as funds are reallocated or budgets readjusted, and personnel hired and terminated. This often results

in inconsistent data being reported to various agencies since some offices generate their own data which are sent to external agencies.

Conclusion

The consolidation of the planning, management and evaluation office with the institutional research office was one that vastly improved both departments, and enhanced the institutional research office's involvement in the decisionmaking process. The two offices work both jointly and independently on various projects, and were able to expand their influence and visibility in the university community. In the future, more and more institutional research offices will have the opportunity to expand their roles and take on new roles and responsibilities as administrators become more aware of the need for IR offices to not only provide information necessary for planning and management efforts, but also to assist in developing strategies to cope with the uncertainty facing them.